Principles of Possibility: Considerations for a 21st-Century Art & Culture Curriculum

BY OLIVIA GUDE

"...to hold out, even in times of deep pessimism, for the possibility of surprise."

—Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*

Has any art teacher ever reviewed the national or state standards for art education or the prevailing list of elements and principles of design and then declared, "I feel so motivated to make some art!" I don't believe so and this is why using standards as they are conventionally written is not an ideal structure on which to elaborate a curriculum. Contemplating the main topics of a curriculum ought to stimulate students' and teachers' anticipation and participation. Modernist elements and principles, a menu of media, or lists of domains, modes, and rationales are neither sufficient nor necessary to inspire a quality art curriculum through which students come to see the arts as a significant contribution to their lives.

An art curriculum is not a mere container of aesthetic and cultural content; a curriculum is itself an aesthetic and cultural structure. Students should be able to sense, examine, and explain the structure of the art curriculum; these explanations should emphasize important ideas and themes associated with traditional and contemporary artmaking practices.

Structuring a Quality Art Curriculum

The essential contribution that arts education can make to our students and to our communities is to teach skills and concepts while creating opportunities to investigate and represent one's own experiences—generating personal and shared meaning. Quality arts curriculum is thus rooted in belief in the transformative power of art and critical inquiry (Blandy & Congdon, 1987; Carroll, 2006; Efland, 1995, 2004; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Gaudelius. & Speirs, 2002; Greene, 1991; Gude 2000, 2004; jagodzinski, 1997; Neperud, 1995; Sullivan, 2004; White, 1998; Wilson, 1997). Despite their frustrations with lack of resources, cutbacks, and the necessity to, once again, prove the importance of the arts in students' lives, the daily witnessing of the transformation of materials and minds keeps art teachers engaged and deeply committed to their work. It is important that we identify and focus on truly foundational principles of art education—meaningful ethical, intellectual, and artistic principles that inspired talented and dedicated people to become art teachers in the first place. As we exemplify the best practices of contemporary arts education, methods to assess and showcase our students' growing aesthetic and intellectual sophistication and their increasing interest and joy in learning will be developed (Boughton, 2004).

The structures on which each art teacher, school, or district elaborates unique curricular approaches should have in common that they investigate big questions about the uses of art and other images in shaping our interactions

Playing. Students discovered and developed images in coffee-stained paper. *Byronic Brine!* by Kelley Leung. Spiral Workshop 2005.

It is difficult to see how complex ideas related to art, history, and culture can be meaningfully interwoven on curriculum structures based on standards related to media use or formal properties.

with the world around us. No one can sensibly claim to give a definitive answer to questions such as "What is art?" or "What is art education?" By its nature art is an open concept that is always evolving and changing (Weitz, 1962). Similarly, art education as a field will continue to expand and shift, incorporating new artistic practices and important contemporary discourses such as cultural studies, visual culture, material culture, critical theory, and psychoanalysis.

All state and national standards for the arts include a "culture clause." For example, Content Standard 4 for the Visual Arts in the National Standards for Arts Education emphasizes the importance of "understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures."[1] It is difficult to see how complex ideas related to art, history, and culture can be meaningfully interwoven on curriculum structures based on standards related to media use or formal properties. Planning a unit on *line* and then deciding to add to it, the study of "cultures that use line in their art" is unlikely to provide a complex, thoughtful approach to the role of art in societies. It makes a lot more sense to plan a curriculum focusing on understanding the role of artists, artistic practices, and the arts in reflecting and shaping history and culture and to then incorporate objectives related to formal properties, analytic techniques, or media processes into these larger themes. What is at stake is making use of the structure of the curriculum to exemplify the very heart of the art educational experience for the student, for the school, and for the community. Do we really want students to say that art is "about" line, shape, color or contrast and repetition?

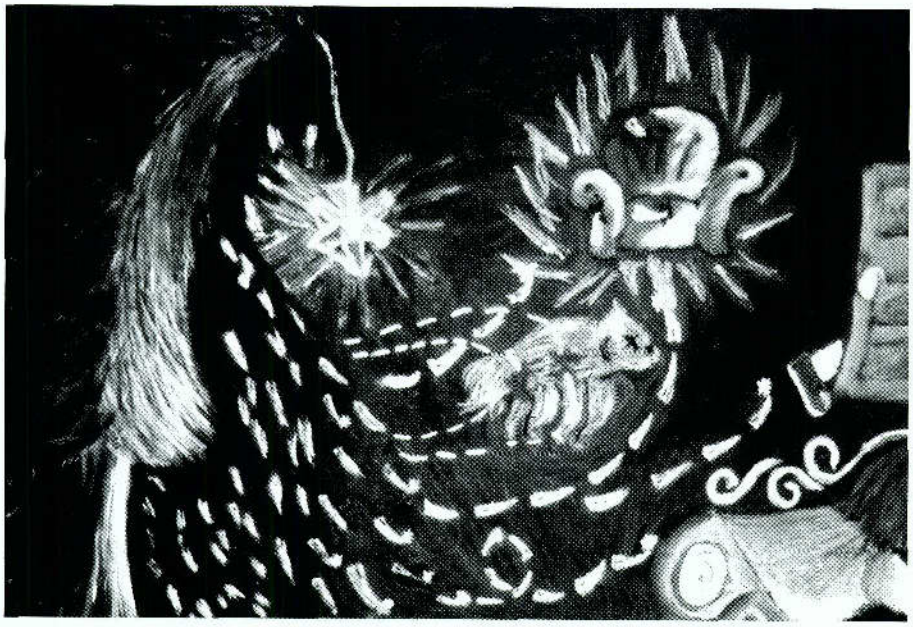
Principles of Possibility

Art educators whose research involves contemporary art, critical theory, or youth empowerment do not consider modernist elements and principles to be uniquely foundational to quality art curriculum or to making or understanding art (Chalmers, 1987; Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Gude, 2000; Paley, 1995; Tavin, 2001). Indeed, it is difficult to find support in serious academic writing (as opposed to commercial textbooks) for using the elements and principles of design as a curriculum structure (Parsons, 2004).[2] It is time for teachers, professors, artists, administrators, supervisors, museum educators, and others committed to the field of art education to articulate categories of study worthy of being the day-to-day conceptual structure of a visual art curriculum. I do not envision that such a dialogue will easily arrive at a consensus structure, nor do I believe that such consensus is necessarily important. There are many meaningful ways to understand and make culture in these complex times.

In "Postmodern Principles: In Search of a 21st Century Art Education," I explored the modernist roots of the current elements and principles, arguing that these were not sufficient to understand contemporary art or to guide students in learning contemporary meaning making strategies (Gude, 2004). I also identified a number of principles by which contemporary art works can be understood and constructed.[3] Yet, I argued that these postmodern principles ought not be used as the structure of an art curriculum by themselves or as addenda to the modernist principles because the field of art education needs more comprehensive frameworks for planning art curriculum. After much thought and experimentation, I offer these *Principles of Possibility*, derived from my understanding of the research and practice of colleagues in the fields of art, media studies, art education, and community arts as well as from best practices of the Spiral Workshop, the University of Illinois at Chicago's Saturday youth artist program for 13-19-year-olds and the Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative, UIC's programs with in-service art teachers. I believe that these principles are a useful structure or checklist that art teachers can use to determine whether a curriculum provides a range of important art experiences. The list is structured, not according to principles of form, media, or disciplines, but from *the students' point of view*, imagining what important ideas about the uses and making of art we want students to remember as significant.

Playing

Learning begins with creative, deeply personal, primary process play. Such play must be truly free, not directed toward mastering a technique, solving a specific problem, or illustrating a randomly chosen juxtaposition (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1965). Students of all ages need opportunities to creatively "mess around" with various media—to shape and re-shape lumps of clay or to watch as drops of ink fall upon wet paper and create riveting, rhizomatic rivulets. However, experimenting with media is not enough to truly stimulate students' creative abilities.



Forming Self. After discussing the sometimes disappointing gaps between expectations and reality, students created real life holiday stories. *Stabby Christmas* by Linda Wong. Spiral Workshop 2002.

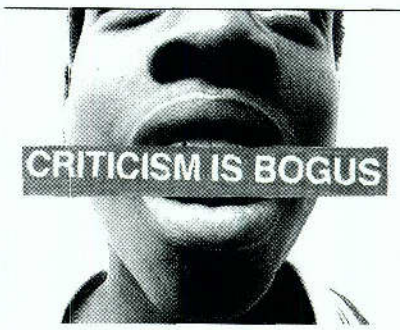
Today's students, over-constricted by an education system that often focuses on knowing the one right answer, need guidance in reclaiming their capacities for conceptual, imaginative play. At Spiral Workshop, each course begins with several hours of creative play based on the gaming methods of the Surrealists (Brotchie, 1995). Students learn Dali's Paranoiac Critical Method, in which they access their unconscious minds by looking for and developing images from inkblots, smoke marks, or wax drippings. They make composite characters by passing folded papers and adding a body part without seeing what others have previously drawn. They make poetry, using methods of chance and collaboration (Breton, 1933).

Initially, students may be confused and suspicious—claiming they don't see anything in the blurs and blobs, but as peers and teachers model an experimental attitude, soon the classroom is filled with exclamations as new images and combinations are spontaneously discovered. Students who are taught to access the creative unconscious don't drive teachers mad complaining, "I don't have an idea." These students have learned the important artistic lesson that artists do not know the outcomes of their works before they begin. Artists immerse themselves in a process of making and sensitively interact with images and ideas as they emerge.

Forming Self

Artmaking can be an important opportunity for students to further their emotional and intellectual development, to help formulate a sense of who they are, and who they might become. Quality projects aid students in exploring how one's sense of self is constructed within complex family, social, and media experiences.

Unfortunately, many projects in art classrooms do not actually promote expanded self-awareness because students are directed to illustrate or symbolize known aspects of self-identity, rather than being encouraged to consider themselves in new ways through investigating content that is often overlooked or taken for granted. Projects in which students include "symbols of themselves" promote narrow, limited, socially pre-defined categories of identity. Illustrating ideas with images available in commercial magazines further narrows students' choices, making it highly unlikely that some nascent idiosyncratic aspect of self will emerge in the artwork. Asking students to reveal "the real you" is essentialist—emphasizing a largely discredited notion of a unified, real self hidden beneath social constraints, in opposition to a more postmodern conception of self as performative, constructed, multiple, and shifting (Mitchell, 1988). Which aspect of a teen's self is more real—writing existentialist poetry at midnight or running cross-country at dawn?

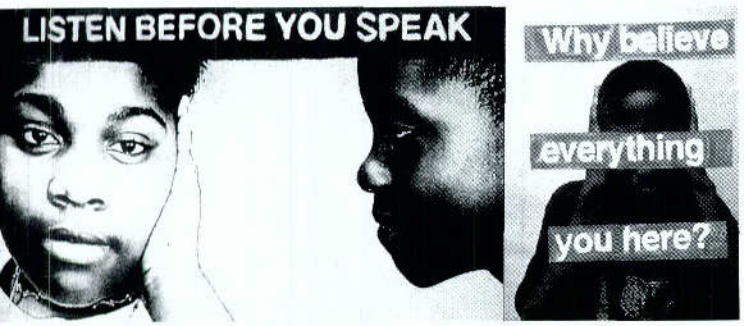


Authentic insight into self is more likely promoted through indirect means, asking students to reflect and recall experiences through making art. Projects such as reconstructing memories of childhood spaces, designing trophies for labels that have been assigned to them by families or schools, depicting a "least liked" body part, or describing how their identities are constructed in part by the objects that they desire often afford students unexpected insights into the self (Gude, 2000). Through a repertoire of projects in which students use diverse styles of representation and various symbol systems to explore various aspects of experience, students become aware of the self as shaped in multiple discourses, giving students more choices about consciously shaping self.

Investigating Community Themes

Great art often engages the most significant issues of the community, calling on each of us to bring our deepest understanding and empathy to our shared social experience (Tolstoy, 1898/1996). In today's interconnected world, these themes encompass the global community. Students whose work investigates issues of real concern to them are more engaged in the learning process. Through collective identification of generative themes, teachers can draw all students into personal engagement with the curriculum content because learning new skills becomes an important skill for exploring significant life issues (Freire, 1968/1970).

Expert dialogical teachers use a wide variety of techniques to identify important generative themes in the community and to structure curriculum in which students discuss and investigate the complexity of these themes in relation to personal implications (Beane, 1990/1993). Sometimes new themes emerge from student artworks on other assignments. Noting that several students in past classes had made pieces about being warned of various dangers (real and fantasized), the Chromophobia[4] group in Spiral Workshop



Investigating Community Themes. Students learned skills in presenting ideas dramatically through cropping images and editing text, while exploring significant generative themes in their school community. The Power of Advertising project was developed and taught by teacher Tracy Van Duinen at Austin Community Academy for the University of Illinois at Chicago's Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative.

2005 invented a project called *Warnings* in which student artists created painted wood plaques of warnings they'd been given by parents. The project proved a rich source of peer discussion about issues related to conventions of behavior, safety, morality, financial management, and appropriate gender roles.

Dialogical pedagogical practice is based in praxis—the unifying of thought and action. Students identify themes, pose problems, consider barriers to change and then create positive actions to alter circumstances (Wallerstein, 1987). In art classes, the obvious choice of action will often be art-based community-education—individual artworks, thematic shows, documentaries, posters, flyers, installations, murals, zines, comics in the school newspaper, etc.—all designed to involve others in reconsidering the inevitability of the status quo.

Imagine a project in which students investigate waste at their own school. After researching issues related to production and disposal, an installation made up of every plastic spork discarded in a single week in the school cafeteria creates an arresting visual display. An accompanying zine contains facts and figures about the plastic used in sporks, documents interviews in which the principal and cafeteria manager explain why the school stopped using metal utensils (in part because students often carelessly threw them away), and showcases several amusing comics about how utopian and dystopian societies of the future will feed students in school cafeterias. Rather than merely espousing clichés against pollution, such a project would ground students, families, and the larger school community in considering how many seemingly small choices contribute to a creating our throwaway society.

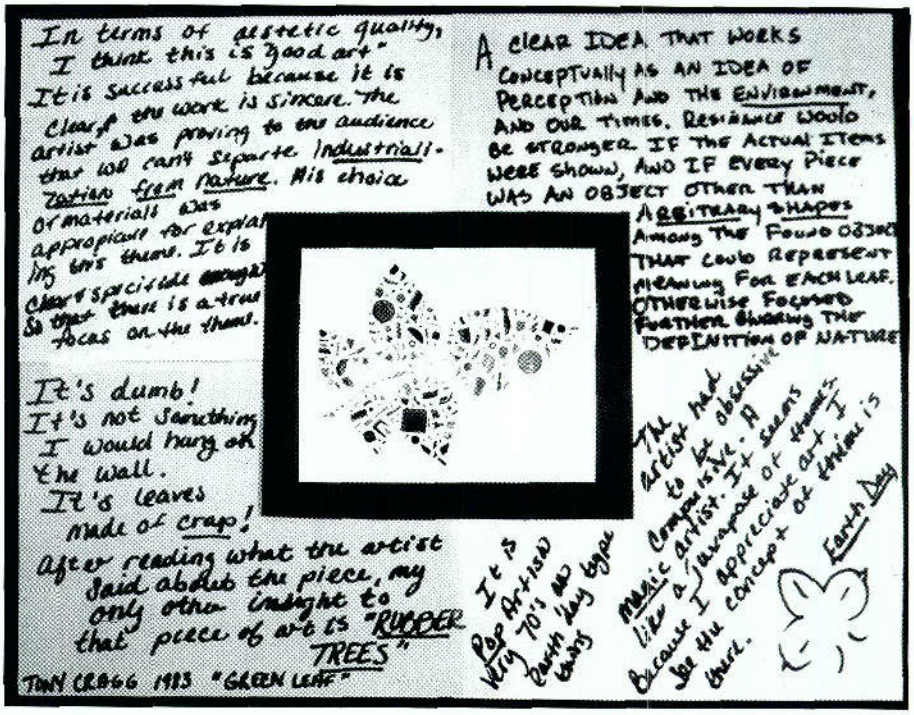
Encountering Difference

Good multicultural curriculum introduces us to the generative themes of others—helping us to see the world through the eyes of others—understanding the meaning of artworks in terms of the complex aesthetic, social, and historical contexts out of which they emerge (Anderson, 1990). It is far better to introduce students to fewer artworks or cultures in depth, than to present many artworks with little or no context (Desai, 2000; Young, 2002).

In his classic work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said identified the many ways in which Western culture created binary oppositions that assigned such qualities as timelessness and sensuality to Eastern cultures and conceived of the West as progressive and rational (1978). Sadly, much multicultural curriculum today re-inscribes stereotypical notions of otherness. These may be "positive" stereotypes—close to nature, spiritual, etc.—nonetheless they are limited ahistoric, essentialist depictions of

Encountering Difference. Students recall times in which the culture of the school seemed out-of-sync with the students' community culture. Selection of pages from *Cinco de Mayo at School Coloring Book* by University of Illinois at Chicago pre-service teacher, Lisa Pereda.

Students in a democratic society need to be able to understand and participate in important cultural conversations generated by the visual arts, film, and other imagemaking practices.



Empowered Experiencing. Students explore the dialogical space surrounding an artwork by recording the responses of four "non-art" viewers. Based on the interview responses, pre-service teachers generated a question sequence to facilitate understanding the artwork and exploring related aesthetic issues. Foundations of Art Education course, University of Illinois at Chicago.

others. Creating multicultural studio projects can easily lead to such deeply problematic simplifications and misrepresentations of other cultures and/or to violating others by visually mimicking their sacred practices.

An excellent way to ensure a more thoughtful and comprehensive approach to other cultures in the curriculum is to not limit the study of others to historical artifacts and undifferentiated representatives of "the people." Do represent "others" for your students as dynamic individuals and groups who are changing and evolving in contemporary times. Explore complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class (Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Check, 2005; Desai, 2002; Garber, 1995; Grigsby, 1990; Gude, 2003; Keifer-Boyd, 2003; Lampela & Check, 2003; McFee, 1995). Ensure respectful representation of difference by utilizing guest visits, videos, or written materials to include the first-person voices of the artists talking about the reasons they make their art, how they developed their working methods, the relationship between innovation and tradition, and how they judge the aesthetic quality of completed works. The goal of good multicultural curriculum is to effectively encounter other points of view in order to question the centrality or normativeness of one's own (also culturally specific) point of view.

Attentive Living

Attuning students to vitally experiencing everyday life should be a goal of any systematic art education. Students will learn to notice and to shape the world around them. Whether creating a community garden, setting the table, arranging tools in a garage, or remarking on the architecture in their home towns, students will understand that artistic thinking is not separate from daily life, but rather can inform and enrich every aspect of one's life (Lemos, 1931; White, 2004). Attentive Living curriculum can take many forms, including such diverse areas as the study of nature, design studies, household arts, traditional crafts, and built-environment curriculums.

Drawing, painting, and photographing natural objects and phenomena such as plants, shells, rocks, clouds, or landscapes sensitizes students to the complexity and beauty of the world around them. Many artists feel refreshed and creatively inspired by immersing themselves in nature (London, 2003). The contemporary study of nature also leads almost inevitably to consideration of the ways in which human societies impinge upon and potentially threaten the natural environment. This directs students to one of the most important generative themes of contemporary life—the tension between development and preservation (Anderson, 1999).

Through architecture and design curriculums, teachers and students examine the ways in which person-made environments shape the quality of life. Students can conduct psycho-geographic investigations to explore the psychological impact of spaces on individuals and on social interactions (Debord, 1958; Gude, 2004). Mapping and local research create opportunities for students to become grounded in a sense of place through understanding the style and evolution of the built-environment and through sharing this information with others, thus becoming a resource for building community and intergenerational networks (Hicks & King, 1999).

Theories regarding design and culture are an important aspect of empowering students to make choices in their lives. Comparing the modern formulation "form follows function" with traditional and postmodern aesthetic approaches that value the decorative, students can identify what they consider to be pleasing design, define their own tastes, and imagine new design solutions. Considering modern to postmodern design from the Bauhaus to Target (or from Arts and Crafts to Martha Stewart) encourages students to consider the interrelated discourses of design and consumerism. The study of contemporary artists such as Andrea Zittel whose artworks suggest the possibility of radically pared down lifestyles or Peter Menzel's *Material World* photographic series in which he documents families from

around the world standing in front of their homes with all of their possessions, engage students in considering material culture issues of design, need, and desire (Grosenick, 2001; Menzel, 1994).

Empowered Experiencing

A quality art curriculum gives students the knowledge they need to notice and interpret a wide range of visual practices. Students in a democratic society need to be able to understand and participate in important cultural conversations generated by the visual arts, film, and other imagemaking practices.

Discipline-Based Art Education established its reputation on the argument that it is important for students to have access to the methods and practices of professional fields in their study of the arts. Responsibly introducing students to today's discursive practices in art history, aesthetics, and art criticism means introducing them to the analytical procedures of the emerging field of visual studies or visual culture (Dikovitskaya, 2005). Such context-based methodologies of art history/criticism have the advantage of building in an awareness of the environment within which the images or artifacts were made—an important aspect of introducing the art of other cultures in the curriculum (Anderson, 1995).

Using the expanded analytical methods of the field of visual studies does not necessarily mean that art can no longer be the chosen focus of an art curriculum. It does mean that students will understand art images within the larger context of living in a society saturated with images, produced for a wide range of purposes. Increasingly, truly understanding contemporary artworks includes an understanding of the tropes (rhetorical devices) drawn from other fields (such as movies, TV, news media, advertising) as much as on the ability to analyze modernist formal principles of description. For example, a painting of a dangling telephone could not very sensibly be interpreted as a phone accidentally knocked off the hook by the dog, but rather, considering the conventions of horror or mystery films, as a sign that someone has been unexpectedly (and violently) removed from the conversation.

Terry Barrett's "Principles of Interpretation" are an excellent framework by which teachers can organize instruction and students can search for meaning within artworks. Principles such as "Artworks are always about something" and "Artworks attract multiple interpretations and it is not the goal of interpretation to arrive at a single, grand, unified, composite interpretation" focus students on making thoughtful evidence-based investigations of the meanings generated by visual images, including the artworks they themselves make (Barrett, 2003, p. 198). His principle "Some interpretations are better than others" gives teachers a method by which to graciously explain that some associations, unsupported by examination of the image, are just too kooky (Barrett, 2003, p. 198). This is crucial to involving students in meaning making. I've seen the energy in classes dissipate when a teacher leading a discussion pleasantly agrees to an utterly irrelevant remark about an artwork. If teachers demonstrate that meaning making is not merely open-ended, but utterly arbitrary, why should students invest their time and energy in trying to make meaningful art or meaningful interpretations?

Empowered Making

Making should remain at the heart of K-12 arts education. Careful consideration of the implications of visual culture writings tends to support this position. W.J.T. Mitchell, a leading scholar in the field of visual culture studies, examines images as a "significant other or rival mode of representation" to text-based knowledge (2005). In this increasingly visual world, many people, including those not officially designated as artists, will make and distribute images as part of a wide range of work-related and personal practices. All students of the 21st century need to know how to construct, select, edit, and present visual images.

The current teaching of artmaking in schools is a hybrid practice. Typical art courses today include the teaching of observational and perspective drawing (modeled on academic practices), teaching color theory and principles of design (based on modernist curriculum), and teaching crafts and media (based on various traditional forms). Many excellent studies on the history of art education explore the reasons why various artmaking practices were deemed important in a child's education at different points in time (Efland, 1990; Smith, 1996; Stankiewicz, Amburgy, & Bolin, 2004; White, 2004). All of these studies remind us that the decision of what to include in a basic art education curriculum is profoundly historical. Contemporary curricula that describe

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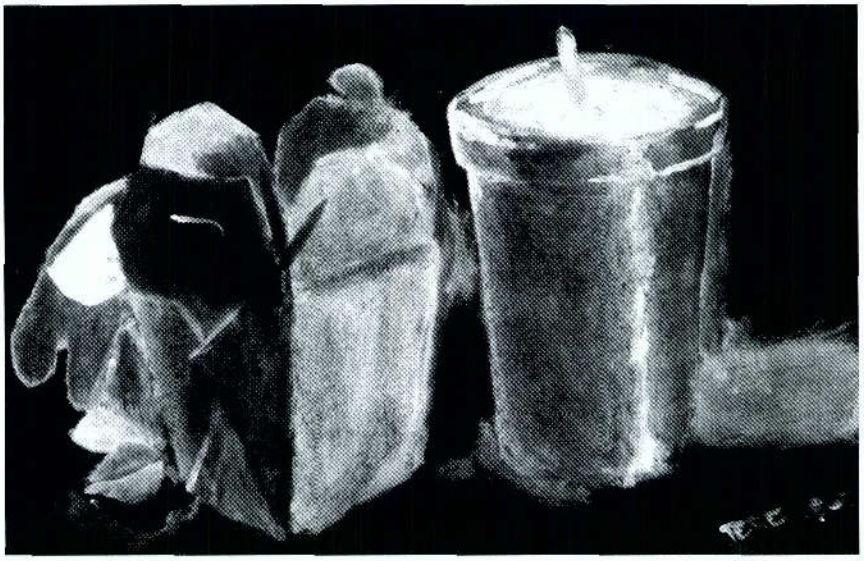
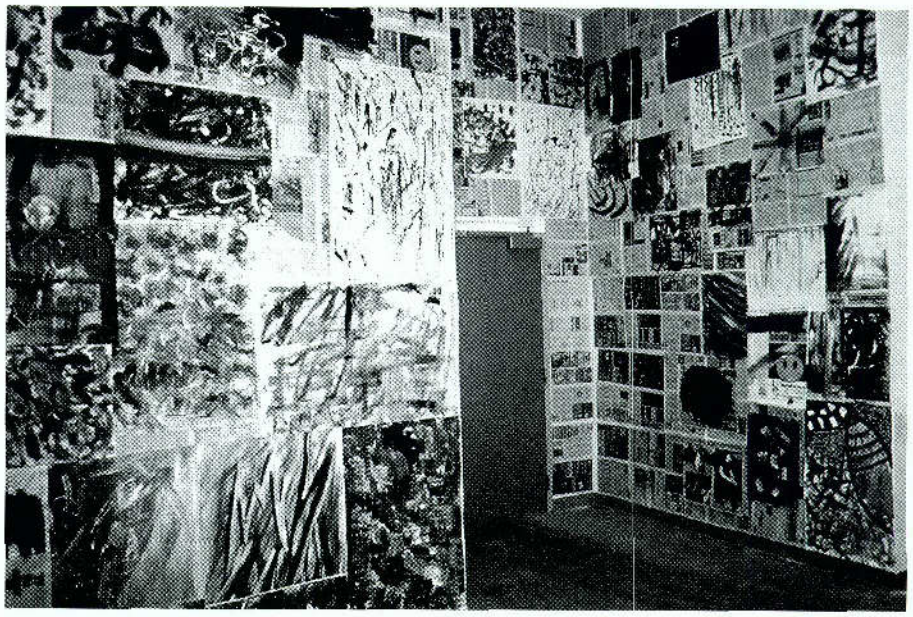


Empowered Making. In the Reality Check group, students develop strong drawing skills and question the relationship between images and one's experience and interpretation of reality. *Desirable Food Still Life* by high school student Terrence Byas. Spiral Workshop 1999.

Art teachers are now faced with the dilemma of designing "hands-on" projects that authentically introduce students to methods used by contemporary artists in conceiving and constructing artworks, rather than continuing to teach outmoded paradigms.



Empowered Making. As a prelude to expressionist painting, each student painted dozens of black and white paint studies on white and black paper as well as on newspaper pages. Installation view of the Bad and Beautiful Painting group. Spiral Workshop 2003.

drawing or elements and principles as *foundational* are echoing the values and theories of a particular era, not objectively stating universal timeless truths. Artists and educators who are responsive to the needs of their current students must consider contemporary as well as traditional artistic and critical practice and ask what students need to know to successfully make and understand art and culture today (Duncum, & Bracy, 2001; Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002; Gude, 2000; Tavin, 2000).

Consider structuring general artmaking courses to introduce six areas of artmaking—expressionism, mimesis, formalism, applied design, craft, and postmodern (including digital) practices.[5] I selected these areas to represent a wide range of aesthetic practices and theories (Efland, 1995; Smith, 1989). Initially, I had hoped to write a section on each aspect of empowered making for this article. Realizing that such an endeavor is the work of a book, I will focus here on discussing some theoretical and practical gaps in much current curriculum, encouraging teachers and researchers to review their curricula and rethink their commitment to ineffective and outdated paradigms. I believe that planning more equitable emphasis among the above listed areas would ameliorate the current curriculum problem of overemphasizing some methods of making and understanding, while virtually ignoring others.

I began the list with *expressionism* because, despite stated goals, judging from the artwork I see produced in schools throughout the country, students are often not given sufficient opportunities to make artworks that are not tightly controlled by realist or formalist parameters. Just how expressive can an artwork be if you *must* make the figure in cool colors and the background in warm colors (or vice versa) or if you *must* use "correct perspective" to draw a remembered place? I have often heard teachers despair that students only evaluate work by the criteria of realism, yet I do not see much curriculum that engages students in authentic expressionist practices. Sadly, it is also common for students to spontaneously produce beautifully expressive works that the teacher thinks are wonderful, but that are rejected by the student and peers as "dumb" and poorly drawn.

By introducing students to expressionistic artworks that students will perceive as "cool," such as those by Baseman, Sue Coe, Patssi Valdez, or the many graffiti-inspired street artists, teachers can draw students into valuing and creating artworks in more spontaneous and deeply felt manners (Baseman, 2004; Coe, 1986; Romo, 1999; Bou, 2005). Standard decontextualized exercises in "expressive line" or "color symbolism" actually *undermine* the teaching of meaningful form because, by definition, for something to be *expressive* or artistically symbolic, the students must be sincerely invested in trying to express something.

Before the age of postmodernism, artists made works within established studio practices, so it was easier to design new art projects because teachers could follow the artists' studio methods and procedures. Now many contemporary artists work in, what is described as a *post-studio* practice, utilizing multiple means of expression (Weintraub, 1996). These artists choose the best materials and fabrication methods for each work.

Art teachers are now faced with the dilemma of designing "hands-on" projects that authentically introduce students to methods used by contemporary artists in conceiving and constructing artworks, rather than continuing to teach outmoded paradigms. For example, many teachers still require students to make hand drawn thumbnail composition sketches—a practice now rarely used by contemporary artists and designers—as a prelude to making a poster.[6] Contrast this with the methods described in the Spiral Workshop poster project, I Can Change the World, in which students use the postmodern principles of *juxtaposition* and *layering*—projecting and overlapping found images in various combinations, creating striking compositions that would not have been conceived using more conventional compositional means.[7] Other Spiral Workshop projects explore such contemporary practices as surprising pairings of image and text or the use of found objects in installations.[8]

If an art teacher is committed to not just encouraging students to produce simulacra (copies empty of authenticity), s/he *must* focus on the actual investigatory procedure of artworks and not solely on the final look of the artwork. Perhaps the worst example, I have seen of this approach, was watching a classroom of students *use a grid system to hand-draw multiple copies (!)* of candy wrappers to make a Pop Art project. Why had the teacher eschewed methods commonly used to make actual Pop Art works—photography, screen-printing, collage, or projection—in favor of early academic methods of copying and enlarging? What did these students learn about the actual methods or reasons that artists of the 1950s and '60s began introducing everyday commercial objects into their art?

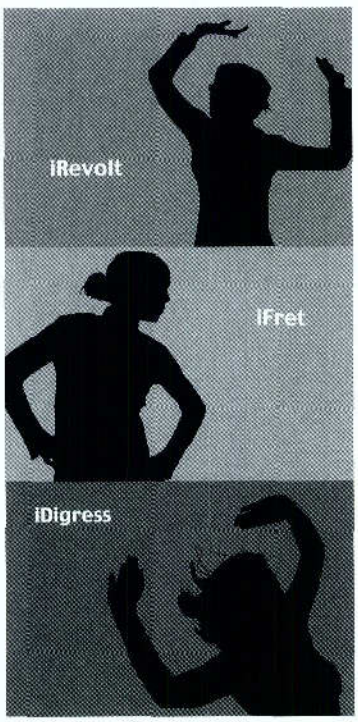
To design a meaningful project, one must carefully analyze the process of the artistic investigation and then structure similar investigatory opportunities for students. In the final project, the students may make a completely different sort of object, but will meet the core objectives of understanding and seeing things in new ways based on a particular form of aesthetic investigation.

Deconstructing Culture

During the latter half of the 20th century, analyzing how notions of "real" and "natural" are constructed in social discourses became the focus of disciplines such as cultural studies, feminist theory, and critical theory. These discourses profoundly influenced traditional disciplines such as art history and anthropology and shaped today's emerging field of visual culture studies. Knowledge of visual culture theory gives art teachers powerful tools to engage students in exploring how their thoughts and desires are shaped through immersion in local and global cultures of visuality. When analyzing the cultural origins and cultural effects of images, teachers are not introducing extraneous "non-art" content into the classroom because our business has always been teaching students to be nuanced observers of how meaning is made through images.

Visual culture concepts can also help teachers to structure contemporary *aesthetic* investigations of the stuff of our everyday lives. Recent Spiral Workshop art projects have been based on visual cultural terms such as Bricolage/Counter-bricolage (the practice of making new meaning out of the pre-made materials at hand and advertisers re-appropriation of youth bricolage styles) and Encoding and Decoding cultural consumption (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). These projects did not merely illustrate theoretical concepts, but rather utilized theory to examine the construction of meaning and to empower students to generate alternative meanings. In a project called *Postmodern Postcards,* students collected typical tourist postcards of Chicago and then made interventions on actual cards or created their own gigantic postcards—depicting Chicago locations as places where friends lived, memories were evoked, or danger seemed to lurk. The final exhibition created a striking visual record of how notions of place in terms of race, class, and culture are constructed within various systems of meaning for differing economic and cultural purposes.[9]

Another rich source of inspiration for deconstruction projects are the writing and images of the Situationist International (Bracken, 1997; Knabb, 1981). Framing students' artwork as taking place within the "Society of the Spectacle" and using techniques such as the *derive* (to become aware of its psychological impact) and the *detournement* (to reveal significant cultural subtexts through surprising juxtapositions) connect students to a rich tradition of subversive avant-garde artists (Debord, 1958a, 1958b, 1967/1994; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004). Books such as *Lipstick Traces* connect the practices of the SI to the DIY (Do It Yourself) aesthetic practices of Punk music and collage. Students thus learn to see the critique of contemporary culture, not as a current academic exercise, but as an ongoing avant-garde tradition of challenging empty materialism and unsatisfying social structures (Marcus, 1989).



Deconstructing Culture. Noticing that the ubiquitous iPod ads usurp the notion of first person agency, the Spiral faculty of the Counterfeit Evidence: Re-rendering Reality group, Michael Radziewicz and Madilyn Soch, created the iRonic project in which students created faux ads that reclaimed the "I" of individuality. From top by Aleia McKay, Coco Millard, Madi Soch. Spiral Workshop 2005.

Subjects typically studied in art classes such as representations of nature, beauty, women, families, or "the Orient" can be investigated in terms of popular and fine art imagery. Students love to "talk back" to dominant discourses by detourning such images—juxtaposing text and pictures that cause us to reconsider established meanings. Contemporary artist groups such as the Guerrilla Girls and the Yes Men, which use many artistic methods, including performance, are also good models for collective artistic investigations. Visual culture theory in art education does not designate pre-conceived notions of what is good, appropriate, or useful in art or other cultural phenomenon. It does give students the ability to analyze how image-making practices shape their own sensibilities and those of the society in which they live. Deconstructionist artmaking reminds students that they are not mere passive recipients of manufactured meaning, but active interpreters who can generate alternative understandings and communications.

Reconstructing Social Spaces

It is not enough for youth culture makers to deconstruct aspects of the current culture that do not support a sustainable global culture of joy and justice. Young artists must also learn to construct new spaces in which caring, courageous communities can emerge.

Artists create social spaces—temporary and permanent opportunities for people to connect and interact. Art teachers can become community-based artists—identifying community themes, working with students to make aesthetic investigations of content, and creating new spaces for discourse through engaging local and dispersed communities through student artworks.

One *can* escape the society of the spectacle by stepping into worldviews generated outside dominant paradigms. Including the perspective of artmaking practices that arise from within local communities into the school curriculum honors the most traditional and the most progressive aspects of social life—preserving what is good, challenging the status

quo, and imagining new artistic and social possibilities (Burnham & Durland, 1998; Congdon, 2004; Jacob, 1995; James, Gonzalez & Mamary, 1999; Klein, 2003).

Creative teachers build on and expand local traditions. The yearly student show of individual artworks can include collaborative pieces that investigate community themes. Local interest and knowledge of quilting might be combined with curriculum studying the Names Project (a gigantic quilt/public art piece that commemorated those lost to AIDS), Chilean arpilleras (narrative needleworks documenting the everyday lives and political issues), or various Peace Quilt projects. The final project could be a collaborative quilt for a local public building, documenting local health issues affecting area children.

Working collectively, students and teachers can literally reshape their schools and communities through creating murals, mosaics, sculptures, pavements, and seating installations.[10] Such projects also reshape the image of youth in the public imagination. Youth are seen (and see themselves) as contributors to public life, not as public nuisances. Exhibitions, art sited in community settings, banners, magazines, pageants, projections, websites, installations, and countless other art forms can be used by students to share their investigations of personal stories, community themes, cultural deconstructions, and meaningful cultural exchanges with others.

Not Knowing

My goal in writing this article is not to create a new canonical list of art education principles. I do want to provide a framework that teachers can use as an outline of the sorts of meaning making experiences that should be included in a curriculum that engages and empowers today's students. I believe in arts-based art education, and I believe that quality arts-based education in the 21st century will include a wide range of technical, theoretical, and cultural perspectives.

A quality art curriculum does not just disseminate art historical, technical, or formal knowledge. Through a quality art education, students become familiar with, are able to use the languages of multiple art and cultural discourses, and are thus able to generate new insights into their lives and into contemporary times. These abilities to investigate, analyze, reflect, and represent are critical skills for citizens of a participatory democracy.

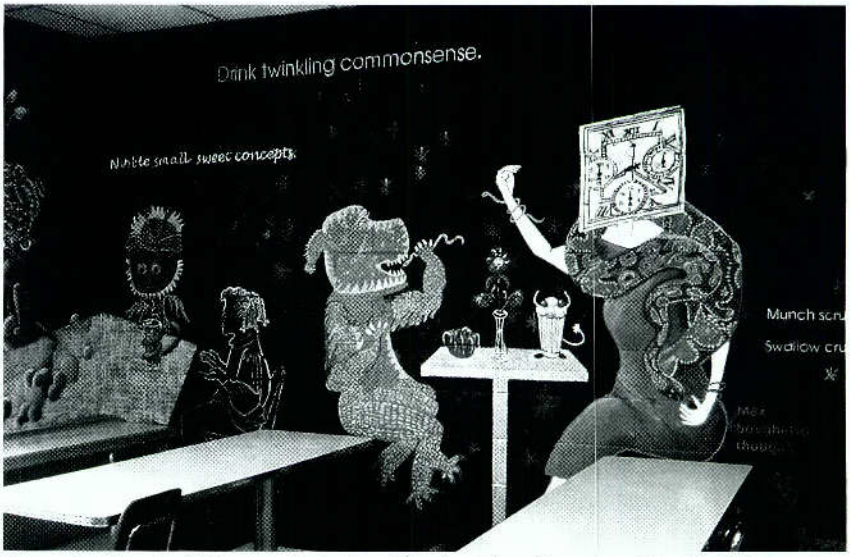
Let's cycle back to the beginning and include another *Principle of Possibility* related to the principle of *Playing—Not Knowing*. Through a quality art curriculum, students will learn that they do not know many things that they once thought were certain. They will learn to see many things differently. They will learn new strategies of making meaning through which they can interrogate received notions of "the real." They will learn how to play, not just with materials, but also with ideas. Understanding that our notion of reality is constructed through representations in language and image, students will not mistake representations for reality as such. They will be able to entertain new ideas and new possibilities.

Believing

When I present or write about art education curriculum based on these *Principles of Possibility*, I am frequently asked how parents and administrators will respond to such a radical re-envisioning of the basic tenets of art education. I believe the *Principles of Possibility* are not shockingly new. They articulate some of the most important goals of 20th-century art education, restated in terms of 21st-century theoretical perspectives. These goals are widely accepted as important by art teachers and other educators, though they are often underemphasized in current art curriculum structures that are based on formalist and media checklists. The goals of the *Principles of Possibility* are especially well understood in diverse communities in which the arts have traditionally played an important role in shaping students' self concepts and sense of agency.

In my experience, school principals do not feel a lot of concern about whether students can recite the K-12 canonical list of elements and principles of design. Principals do take note when they visit an art classroom in which the students are passionately comparing how a sense of character is developed in the visual metaphors of both Surrealist and realist portraits. Parents pay attention when their

Through a quality art education, students become familiar with, are able to use the languages of multiple art and cultural discourses, and are thus able to generate new insights into their lives and into contemporary times.



Reconstructing Social Spaces. Students and faculty at Evers Elementary School in Chicago worked with visiting artist Olivia Gude to transform the school cafeteria with images and texts into a space that stimulates wonder in the process of learning. *The Marvelous Surrealist Café*, 2002.

Not Knowing. Paradoxically translating the quick medium of collage into the ancient art form of mosaics, neighborhood teen artists led by Olivia Gude and Juan Chávez created a significant question to greet Lowell Elementary students each day. Chicago Public Art Group, 1998.

children bring home artworks that record stories about special moments in family life. Other teachers are impressed when the hallways are filled with vivid collages accompanied by thoughtful artist statements. These *Principles of Possibility* emphasize developing students' abilities to engage in sustained inquiry without requiring a clear right answer and enable students to utilize a number of approaches to interpret meaning in a wide variety of visual and verbal texts. These qualities are characteristic of exemplary students in all disciplines—qualities that will be noticed by administrators, families, and students.

Art teachers have a healthy suspicion of overly prescriptive educational initiatives as well as a deep commitment to creative living. In recent decades, art teachers have been increasingly stymied by formalist curriculum that is out-of-sync with today's students and today's cultural avant-garde. They've also encountered traditionalists who suggest that teaching contemporary theory with which students can investigate conventions of constructing gender, race, beauty, or normality is an abandonment of their roles in fostering the creative development of children! Yet youth need these more open, reconstructed social spaces in order to have the freedom to develop their full potential.

Let us now collaboratively choose new curriculum categories that give central places to the diversity of creative thought and action possible in postmodern times. Most art teachers I meet have a quality of "radical proactivity." Art teachers are optimists. They believe in the possibility of a more playful, sensitive, thoughtful, just, diverse, aware, critical, and pleasurable society. They combine the sensibilities of artists with the social awareness of community organizers. If it is indeed true that our notions of the real and the possible are shaped in cultural discourses, art teachers have the potential to change the world.

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ENDNOTES

[1]National Standards for Arts Education. The standards outline what every K-12 student should know and be able to do in the arts. The standards were developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, through a grant administered by The National Association for Music Education (MENC). Available on-line through the Kennedy Center ArtsEdge website:http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm

[2]*The Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education*, a comprehensive collection of important topics in art education lists only four references to the elements and principles of design. Three are included in text and tables in which Arthur Efland narrates a history of art education curriculum and the fourth is in a thoughtful article "Art and the Integrated Curriculum" by Michael Parsons in which he offhandedly notes, "The ideas sometimes called *the elements and principles of design* [this author's emphasis] (such as line, shape, color, and balance, contrast, and focus) may be unique to art but they are no longer thought to be the most important" (p. 786).

[3]The originally published edited list of postmodern principles included *appropriation, juxtaposition, recontextualization, layering, interaction of text and image, hybridity, gazing,* and *representin'*. Recently, I have been working on an expanded list that includes more principles such as *provocation, investigation, uncanny, indeterminacy,* and *abject.*

[4]Chromophobia: Painting in a Culture of Fear curriculum was developed and taught by Alicia Herrera and Brenda Vega in collaboration with Spiral Workshop 2005 Co-directors Olivia Gude and Jessica Poser.

[5]These remarks are specifically written thinking about elementary and middle school art classes as well as introduction to art courses at the high school level. However, this approach can also be easily modified and adapted for specialized courses in high school such as photography, ceramics, or painting—emphasizing concepts of artistic practice not based solely in the exploration of various subcategories of media.

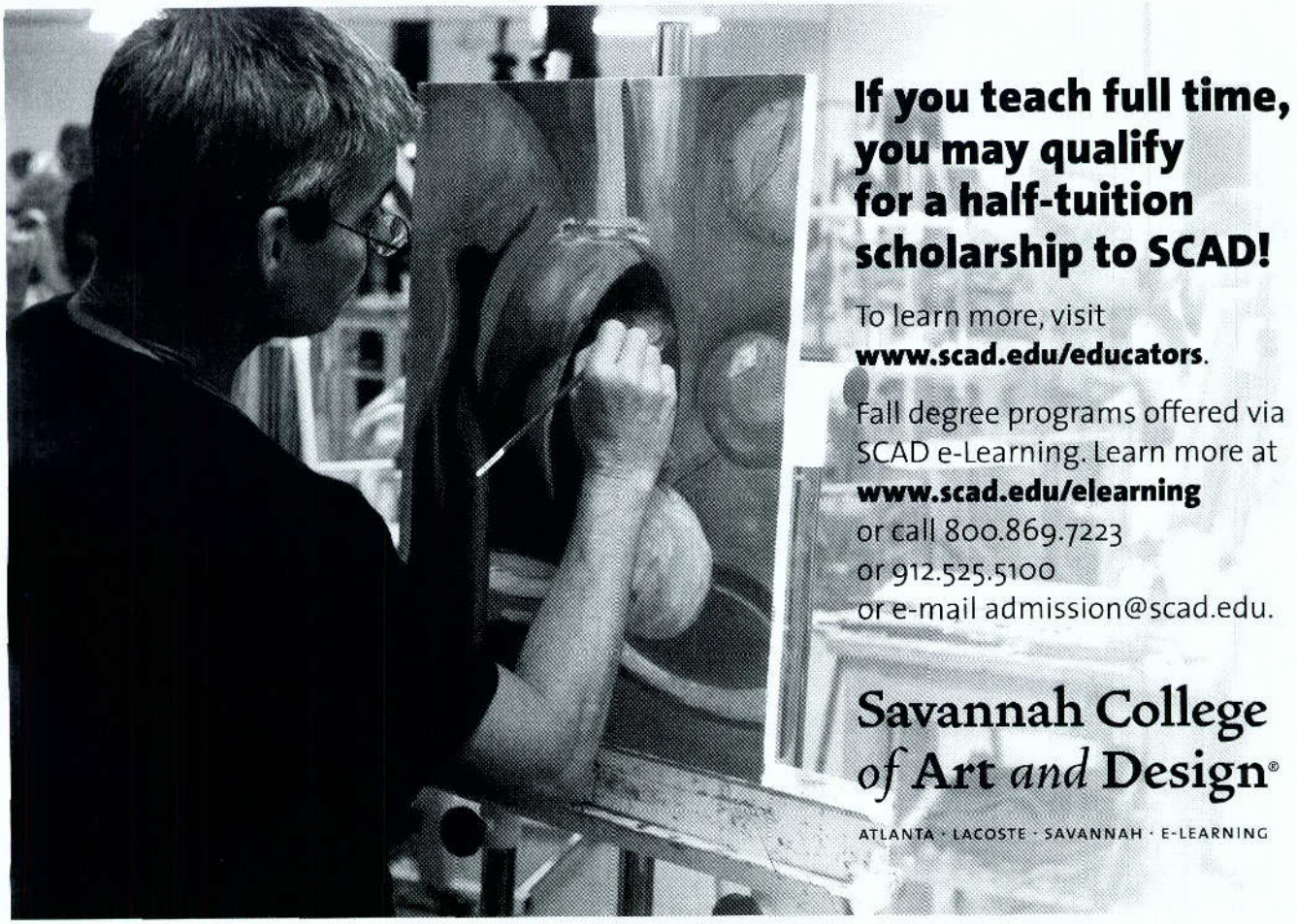
[6]It is vitally important that art teachers regularly make teacher sample projects of assignments. If teachers fear that students will be overinfluenced by the teacher's style choices, don't show students the teacher's projects. However, do make a new sample of each project at least every two or three years. When following this proceedure, many teachers are fascinated to note that their own working practices are radically different from those they recommend to students.

[7]I Can Change the World project on the Spiral Art Education website: http://spiral.aa.uic.edu

[8]Many of the projects on the Spiral Art Education website are designed to stimulate the kinds of conceptual artistic play that preceed making artworks in post-studio styles of working. For example, see Evidence, Materials-based Self-Portrait, Memory Museum, Video as Installation and Word Pictures projects on the Spiral Art Education website: http://spiral.aa.uic.edu

[9]See Spiral Art Education Website: Spiral Workshop: Reality Check Group, http://www.uic.edu/classes/ad/ad382/sites/SpiralWorkshop/SW_02/SW_02.html

[10]See the on-line *Chicago Public Art Group's Community Public Art Guide: Making Murals, Mosaics, Sculptures, and Spaces,* (Ed.) O. Gude. This is a comprehensive guide to techniques for community involvement, collaborative design and execution, and technical considerations as well as hundreds of examples of high quality community-based artmaking from the archives of the CPAG. www.cpag.net



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SOURCE: Art Educ 60 no1 Ja 2007
WN: 0700104404001

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